



The Widow's War

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The "superb" *New York Times* bestselling author delivers a sweeping epic set during the early days of the Civil War.

In 1853, Carolyn Vinton is left alone and pregnant after her fianc?, abolitionist doctor William Saylor, disappears. After his stepbrother convinces her that William is dead, Carolyn accepts his offer of marriage, not realizing that she is being drawn into an elaborate ruse by her new husband and his father, a pro-slavery senator--and that William is still alive.

Their passionate reunion takes place in the midst of the violent Civil War, as abolitionists and pro-slavers battle over the Kansas Territory. Now only their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs--and for each other--can save them.

The Widow's War Details

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From Reader Review The Widow's War for online ebook

Marilyn says

First book from this author. I didn't realize how much Kansas contributed in the start of the Civil War. Overly dramatic at times for me.

Elaine says

Every once in awhile I need a civil war, abolitionism novel fix. *The Widow's War* is just that. It starts out in 1853 with our heroine, Carolyn Vinton, living in Rio De Janeiro. The book follows her to Washington, DC and then to Lawrence, Kansas. Carolyn is a staunch abolitionist dedicated to the fight against slavery. It describes the many challenges that she faces along the way.

The Widow's War combines our history of the fighting between the pro-slavers and abolitionists in Kansas 1854 with the love story of Caroline and William Saylor. I loved reading about Caroline's strength and determination to fight for and protect the people that she loves! She is only one of the many great characters throughout this novel. Some are fictional and others are based on real persons e.g., John Brown.

I found *The Widow's War* while browsing through Barnes & Noble's sale rack one afternoon and I'm very happy that I did! I'm going to give it four stars. Nice writing Mary Mackey!

Suzanne says

I needed a book set in Kansas and I have a love of historical fiction. I ran across this book, which features the fight for Kansas Territory between the abolitionists and the pro-slavers during the mid 19th century, and it seemed like a great fit.

There were parts of this novel that I really liked. Mackey told how both sides flooded Kansas with sympathizers and predictably, violence broke out. She detailed information about John Brown and his sons, how groups of abolitionists stole slaves in Missouri and brought them north, and how pro-slavers took the law into their own hands, burning the property of abolitionist and even hanging them.

The story of Carrie Vinton as a woman wronged by a fortune seeker was a bit out there. It reminded me of a romance novel, but didn't quite go that far. Her story just wasn't that believable. 2 1/2 stars.

Tara Chevrestt says

I enjoyed this.. I really like Mark MacKey's writing style. I do think *The Notorious Mrs. Winston* is a bit better than this one tho. Whereas *Mrs. Winston* takes place during the Civil War, *Widow's War* occurs in just before the war in a much divided Kansas. The book starts in Brazil where the heroine, Carrie thinks her lover

has died of disease and being left with child and unmarried, she accepts the most appealing option available to her and marries Deacon, her lover's stepbrother and travels back to the States. What Carries doesn't realize is the States is on the verge of a civil war, the main topic being slavery and she has unknowingly married into a pro-slavery family. Carrie and her former lover, William, are both abolitionists. However, that is the not the only surprise awaiting her stateside arrival. Carries soon discovers that she has been duped. William is very much alive out there somewhere, her new husband is a liar and con artist, and she is now broke to boot. Not a woman to be easily deterred, a pregnant Carrie holds a gun to her husband's head, threatens him, and runs off to Kansas to find William.

She not only finds William, but gets involved in an underground railroad movement. As tensions mount as to whether or not Kansas is going to be a slave or free state and abolitionists face constant attacks from slave holders, Deacon is hunting her down and intends to take his child away from her. Can she outrun him, protect her child, and keep her lover in the process?

The battle of good and evil is fought between two men. John Brown, an abolitionist and Henry Clark, a loose model of William Quantrill. Both of these men are portrayed as somewhat psychotic. Their characterizations were a bit extreme, causing the loss of half a star in my opinion. The other half of the star is missing due to the story being a bit rushed at times. Too much story is summed up too quickly in at least two locations. When Carrie loses a baby on the ship to America, the situation is quickly told to reader via letters she is writing to her dead mother. Later, at her Kansas home, traumatizing raids are briefly mentioned, but Carrie's own experiences with them are summed up in two sentences saying she has bad dreams and cannot remember what they are.

Good book. Great historical detail about Kansas and pre civil war tensions. I didn't realize till now how big of a role Kansas played in it. Recommended.

Jillian says

Great book! It was really nice to read a historic novel that looks at a time period that isn't talked about as much. The battle over Kansas was really the beginning of the Civil War, and Mary Mackey explores what it took for people to settle there during this time period, they put their faith and their lives on the line to make their life better. Carrie is a strong faith filled woman who follows her heart and soul all the way. Would recommend it for anyone who is a historic fiction reader, and even if you aren't!

Gretchen says

Note to self...it would have been good to check the author before buying this book. I had a book of the same title on the TBR list, so when I saw this on sale at Borders I picked it up. It wasn't what I was expecting, but still a good book.

This novel is set primarily in the US during the late 1850s, as abolitionists and slavers battle over Kansas. It's part of the run-up to the Civil War that I don't know much about, so was interested to learn. Carrie Vinton is the "Widow" and her battle is a personal one. While she has strong opinions on slavery herself, her primary issue is finding her husband and child.

I had some issues with the writing as I'm not a fan of first person present tense. I also think some of the plot threads were left hanging (too many characters pop in and omit without resolution) But overall, this was an enjoyable novel.

Katrina Patton says

Let me start by saying that I have not been known to read a lot of historical fiction. However, the cover of my copy of this book intrigued me. I like stories with strong women and this book certainly fits that.

I had a lot of trouble with the writing style at first. The present tense really threw me off because I'm so used to reading stories written in past tense. After about 50 pages I stopped noticing it so much. The positives about this are that it flowed quickly, the descriptions were just enough to give you a feel for the settings without bogging you down in details, and the characters were likeable.

Overall, it was a pretty good book. It kept me interested and gave me more motivation to read other historical novels. I never realized how interested I was in the Civil War era but I found a lot of the information to be fascinating. And who can argue with a story about a woman who travels alone and pregnant across territorial Kansas? I loved Carrie and it was refreshing to read about powerful and brave females, not only her.

Jessica says

I had few skills as a child but I could read. Yes, when tested in fourth grade I was doing less than a third grade math, but I was reading at the twelfth grade level. At least she has that, I can imagine my parents and teachers thinking.

At least I had that. I read when I could, constantly. I also was an early morning riser, getting up around six despite everyone else in my family had major night owl issues. I was told I could get out of bed if I was quiet. So I would sit on the couch in the living room and read. At some point, I started going under my mother's bed for novels, having gone through all the children's books in the house not to mention the weekly library pile.

What did I turn up? Historical fiction. Lots of it. Suddenly I was in different countries, places much different than California, San Francisco, Contra Costa county, Orinda. I was in England during the olden days. I was in Africa. And lordy, these people were up to no good with each other, often!

My first was Penmarric, and I will never forget the beach tent scene! Who-ha! Here's what I found on Amazon about it:

Set against the starkly beautiful landscape of Cornwall, PENMARRIC is the totally enthralling saga of a family divided against itself. At the center of the novel is the great mansion called Penmarric. It is to Penmarric that Mark Castallack, a proud, strange, and sensitive man, brings his bride Janna--the first act in a tempestuous drama that was to span three generations....

This book came out in 1971, so I was likely about 10 when I read it. My mother and I had a little chat about

all that beachy-ness and losing of "cherries," but I kept reading this type of novel, and as I grew older and could figure out where they were in the library, I pulled them off the shelves in stacks. What would I find? The plucky, strong, independent female character who had feelings that were like mine--i.e., not always pure or good or nice--and was downtrodden by someone or something. People were against her, dammit! Life was not fair but this character was no victim. She could pull herself up by her crinolines and get the hell out of Dodge, Rome, Persia, Siam, Bangkok, Manila, and Haiti. She was going to right a wrong and she often did, all the while holding true to her core beliefs and values.

Usually, she'd met one good man and one bad man along the way, and, of course, I was rooting for the good man. In a typical historical that bent truth (when using real life folks) my happy heroine and the good man were together in the end. At other times when history made it impossible, we knew that, at least, they should have been together for all time. If they'd had their way, they would have been, but wars, earthquakes, evil queens, or feuds kept them apart for all time.

These novels transported me, took me up and away from the early morning aloneness, and later, kept me vastly entertained. I learned something as I read, and I also had a very nice romance usually as well.

During my current recuperation, I read Mary Mackey's novel *The Widow's War*. (tiny spoilers follow) Mary has written that heroine I wrote about, the plucky strong (and beautiful) Carrie Vinton, who lives in Rio in 1854. Carrie survives a plague and an unnamed fever, only to find that her betrothed William has disappeared and is presumed dead and that she is pregnant with William's child. William is the good man.

Her father died during the plague, and Carrie finds herself wealthy and pursued by William's stepbrother Deacon Presgrove (the bad man, who brings the bad news about William's death). Deacon pressures her to return home, somehow very understanding of her pregnancy and wary of Rio's medical set up.

Off they go to the then swamp of Washington DC, where Carrie realizes that not all is as it seems with Deacon's life, beliefs, family, and values. Life isn't good in DC, and not only does she her baby die an hour after birth, but she begins to piece together the sick world she's now in. Pretty much after she finds Deacon in the brothel with his personal slave/whore (Carrie is a firm abolitionist) and realizes that he's stolen all her money, she heads out to the territories because she has reason to believe that William is alive and working there with abolitionists. Deacon lied to her about his death, and she's going to find William despite the fact that she's pregnant again with Deacon's child.

Now comes the part that that's fun in a historical. We are able to fight the pro-slave people, meet up with strong anti-slavery folk, fight the good fight, and put all that was torn asunder back into place. So damn satisfying!

Mary Mackey writes wonderfully, providing us with the story we expect but with clear, descriptive writing. The study of the Kansas Territory and the abolitionist movement there is worked in without the creaks and groans of "I am history" ringing in our ears. Carrie is of her time, but not so much that we can't have that "I am woman with you" relatable moment. William isn't as developed as I would like--I learned more about Deacon than I did him. But this isn't William's story. It's about Carrie believing in her life, following her intuition, and putting her story back together again, for her and for us.

Joan Snodgrass Callaway says

The law regarding estate of deceased husband during this time period. As a woman who was widowed at age 40 with four teen-agers, I immediately put myself into the widows place - what if our home, all of our belongings, insurance benefits, etc. had gone by law to the oldest male relative in my husband's family? What if we had had to go and live how he determined? Our lives would have been very much different. I couldn't help but put myself into her place. I would have fought "a war", too.

Dorothy says

I really loved Mary Mackey's *The Widow's War*. It's a wonderful novel set in Kansas in the violent and dangerous days leading up to the Civil War. Part love story, part adventure, part intriguing exploration of a lesser known piece of Civil War history, it's both beautifully written and an exciting read.

Mary Mackey's strong, beautifully drawn heroine is Carrie Vinton, an abolitionist tricked into a marriage to a pro-slaver when her fiancé, William Saylor, disappears during a smallpox epidemic in Brazil. Alone and pregnant, Carrie has no reason to doubt William's half-brother, Deacon, when he tells her William is dead. When Deacon promises to take care of Carrie and her child, and to help her work to end slavery, Carrie agrees to marry him. When she discovers that Deacon has married her to gain access to her money (in order to give it to the pro-slavers) and that he has lied about William's death, she wastes no time weeping into her handkerchief. She strikes out to seek William, and finds herself in one of the most dangerous places in the country—Lawrence, Kansas.

I had no idea of the pivotal role that Kansas played in the days leading up the Civil War, and Mary Mackey brings the era to vibrant life. Carrie is fierce, engaging, and unapologetically bold as she battles for the Abolitionist cause, yet is entirely believable. I was immediately drawn into Carrie's world, and loved following her from Brazil to the cutthroat politics of Washington, to the abolitionist town of Lawrence. All of the characters in the book are beautifully depicted and as soon as I started reading I felt like I was part of Carrie's world. Can't wait to delve into the rest of Mary Mackey's work.

Lesia says

The Widow's War by Mary Mackey. It is about Kansas becoming a free state and the fight it took in 1856. GO FIGURE that the book is centered with real history about John Brown. I knew nothing about him when I went to Harper's Ferry a few years back. A building of his is still there down by the bridge. John Brown is known to have started the Civil War. Then when I randomly took a different route back to our hotel, I went through the town that George Washington gave to his brother. Across the street from where I grabbed a sandwich, ironically, was the courthouse that they hung John Brown from! This book talks about John Brown and how he helped Kansas become a free state before the Civil War. So it explained how he started it and was using slaves to raid against pro-slavers. I enjoyed reading this little piece of history and reflected back on my little day trips. I so enjoyed them.

Beth says

Mary Mackey has masterfully blended the history of pre-civil war Kansas' struggle to become either a slave or free state, sitting on the edge of your seat plot twists and fascinating characters in THE WIDOWS WAR. Carrie is the perfect heroine. Sometimes romantic others brutal, this outstanding historical novel will shock and inform the reader regarding the evils of slavery, white supremacy and the horrific crimes committed on American soil.

Misfit says

How interesting, I had no idea Kansas territory was such a hotbed over the slavery issue well before the Civil War. Raised in Brazil, Carrie Vinton recovers from a sickness that has swept over Rio de Janeiro and taken both her father and her fiancé, Dr. William Saylor. Finding herself pregnant (but wealthy), she is gulled into trusting William's step-brother and agrees to marry him and return to Washington. She loses the baby on the voyage, but worse is yet to come as she discovers her husband and father in law (a powerful senator) are pro-slavery and plan to use her wealth to promote their agendas in Kansas Territory. Carrie discovers that William did not die and she abandons her husband in the hopes of finding her beloved in Kansas. Will she succeed? Can the two lovers survive as the pro slavery and abolitionist factions ignite the countryside? Will Desmond be able to wrest his child back from Carrie and William?

That all sounds pretty promising and while I did enjoy the book and learning about this period along with such a strong willed female character (no helpless victim here), there were just a few shortfalls that kept this from being a great book. I'm not terribly fond of the present tense, which supposedly brings an *immediacy* to the story, but I just didn't find myself getting sucked into either the story or the characters - I was always on the outside looking in. Worse yet, was the black and white nature of the characters pro-slavers = very very bad evil mean awful people and abolitionists = very very good kind honest people. It's a shame, because the history the story is based upon sounds fascinating and I'd love to see a big fat meaty book on the topic. If it's a period you want to learn more about, don't be afraid to give it a whirl, it usually is just me who's in the minority (but I'm used to that). Three stars.

Molly says

I liked how the story started on Brazil. Goes on to how the main character was duped. The ending part on Kansas was interesting but got to political for my tastes and the story dragged.

Miss Pippi the Librarian says

Before the Civil War, the territory of Kansas was in a turmoil. People were fighting between a claiming the state as pro-slavery or free. It's historical fiction with a lot of history intertwined in the tale. Makey does include a chronology and historical note in the beginning of her novel as well as an author's note at the end.

Makey's writing style was very unique. It was a mix of italicized insights from the characters and present tense. I felt bogged down at times because I am not accustomed to her style of writing, but I was determined

to finish the novel. The story is brutal because of the strong feelings and beliefs that bring fights and battles.

Time Period: Pre-Civil War, 1853-1856

Location: Brazil, Washington D.C., Kansas

Reviewed from a library copy.
